

MEETING POINTS

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Abstract

A collection of poems.

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I

No Signs

But I am trying
to assure myself of something
about relationships—
that they don't depend on reading?

That here's a dense grammar
and I have no wit
and I am snarled in it.
Arrows marking up a gradient
too damn steep to follow? Fuck.

I am Br'er Rabbit again.
I am charming my captors
to throw me down
my lucky briarpatch again
in order to see how under it I am.

How again, tiny and misbegotten
of a three-dozen or so
litter I am, how I confused is
and am one
as far from home as

I. No map have I.
This thorned arrangement, just,
of vines I want
to cut my throat in half.

Following a Night with Three Marxists in which I Did Not Speak a Word

A chilly morning.

I can't think
what to blame.

Hollow's how I feel.
I walk to buy milk

for breakfast
and test my voice

on the cashier.
The early light is yellow.

It is my fingers'
elongated shadows

blocking sun for puppetry—
I watch them

as if I were not
their brain—

that catch me
being solid.

I cry lugging home
my bag of milk

so close it is
between me and day.

Praxis

Cloistered women of the 13th century invented
a *sacré-cœur*, the Christ-vision in which
he braces a dripping sword between two mounds
that are the right and left atria
of the upper heart. The mutual piercing
of spirit and flesh brings about an ineffable pleasure
that emanates from the core and infiltrates
the blood. These holy women likewise
located orgasm at the center
of their body, though I do not know
if celibate sex enters by other cavities
than the opening through which
you have penetrated me.
I do not know how we've come together
or where or even if.

Boarders

In loco parentis are the open feet of stairs
warding like loveless guards
the boys' and girls' flights and fancies.
They trip us up on our way—too hasty.

On my crummy stoop I find a flower.
Battered. From you. You ascend
the eaves and I singly shunt myself up
a stairwell as I've done and done one
then another since I was first a girl in institutes.

Cruel feet. Unnatural place for youth
to test out *drunk* and *fuck* as practiced words—
beneath the order stairs command us rise.
Goodnight. Sign me out for five.
Meet me by my dorm. I want you
flower boy to be my first love.

I want to break you. To break your tender
waking heart. To wake tonight and zone
illicit against your breast. Mix up our subjects.
Do one another's at-home work
in a little world of climbing that is not home
so must be something like a half-place.
A staircase?

Singing in the Road

Why don't we do it in the road?
Or so goes the gravel voice
of the living Beatle—asking,
demanding, I suppose, the question
of why not to die for the sake of passion.

There comes a time in depression,
February, half-past eight—
not, in other words, late,
but dark enough, and icy—
when, as it happened for me:

the bus. Its mechanical lilt
warning walkers. *I'm turning.*
You will be flattened
by the lack of what you perceived
over the drum inside your head.

Fancy that, lover, in the road,
no one watching. The barreling bus
swings. I would barely have known.
I would barely have felt
my body—respond to the why.

And, why don't I? We:
I mean, me and the macadam.
Eternally wed.
Together again,
like George and John. Dead.

We Protest!

It is two AM, and we are all drunk.
We are all hungry. We are all
marching on the avenue
off the red bank of the US
on our way to be patrons.

Our boots, all, have flattened
the sidewalk sedge, that is, crumpled
the green that blunts
its hardest edge and may even
have spared some mothers' backs,
you know, because of the cracks.

No loitering. Go home.
These signs are portents
for tonight, we know.
And we'll oblige, disperse
the way pigeons part
when their assembly's busted
by a shopping cart.

But what really shocks us is on the ledge:
brick, trimmed with a razor hedge—
pigeon pins to prevent shit
from interrupting free exchange.
We pass these needles every day!

Tonight, we will name
this roost prevention *torture*,
then march for a few minutes more,
on our way to buy
chicken from the fried chicken store.

Zoo Ohio

Who remembers the day in Ohio
when a keeper of rare creatures
cut their restraints and
took himself out?

Stockpiles of strange animals
born in America
and bread for trophy
had been kept from us until then.

Locals checking the weather
out the window rather saw
beasts pawing donkeys
and the florid asses of baboons.

They waved and clapped
until guardsmen came
with Kevlar vests and duty.
News helicopters swarmed

the air to take bird's eye
shots of tigers' blood wetting
the crimped grain fields
and bodies like unusual litter.

Oh dead farmer.
What a way to leave things.
Releasing exotics into Ohio
and making yourself

the whole human loss
in a national blip with apocalypse.
How thrilled we were
to see the skirmish end

only one man down
and omit the sunny morning
when others would clear out
corpses from our range.

Cow

Oh chicken hawk wing beating on snow.

Oh rabbit heart. Oh flash.

Oh echo of quickness off the leaf-bare ash.

Oh wild, fingered shadow and circling crow.

Oh dumb, witnessing eye of a cow.

Oh frost-numb fields un-whited by fear.

Oh dark. Oh near.

Tot

Two bodies make
a hole—ring-shaped—
between them.

Stretching out their arms
in the moment of completion,
before the long and dirty effort
of backfill must be thought,
each is a lower-case t:
pure token, handless, un-serifed

and therefore, groping
for nothing. Two crosses,
tending an abyss. This
is the German word for dead.

Twin Language

A hematoma is a blood field. A meadow that has a fence is a blood yard. What is a blood yard but a test-field for our toleration of other types? The neat blood of meters and the odd blood of English. The blood in the basin and blood spillage and terrorists. Blood drones and red queens. Clubs. Cups. My stars. A water foot. Twelve. Long lost bodies and their missing bloods.

My brain, too, and it as an enclosure similar to a sun, fusing a private energy to outlast, be out last and still outlast the corpses in the statued field, the blood then maggot blood long since vapor—outlasting in my unnumbered black plane.

The only bother was my big chest blackening like a melanoma reminds that the sun is poison.

I can't tell the difference (can you?) between a beautiful woman and the foreshadow of annihilation. I can't tell the difference between a drone and a berry. I want to eat them both. I hate the stickiness but I love its sweet burn.

I can't tell the difference between my own love and my own brain. I can't tell the difference between a penis and a broken heart. Likewise with my hormones and my heart.

There are things like faith I understand but can't explain. For this reason, they seem equally to belong to everyone, so I give mine away to whoever is greediest.

I perceive the fence at the edge of the meadow, and you are claiming it is not there. I perceive that my body is my own fence. I perceive am full of fear.

I walk the world the picture of complaint—I walk in this barbed dress. You do not recognize nuns when you see us. My sisters and I are singular. And we have no claim on authority but our voices. We are abandoned mistresses. Nobody believes us because we can't talk lines. We can't talk lines. We jazz June in a world hot on emoji. I, we, are angry at you. Why, dear God, why can't I follow?

And God replies: take a vacation from fear. Swallow the pills no one prescribed. They were a gift from your mother. Vacation is a

construction of capital. Trip, take a trip. Evacuate your little fiefdom and tell a penis of your love.

This is a poem to the world out there. Stop having opinions. Stop needing order. I am also a frequency, a frantic trough, an energetic seizure. Where to go but deeper?

I am telling you, my friends, there is something lovely in your desire to connect. I know I am a hard case. I don't want to be forgotten. My silence, it is a kind of gravity.

Depressives who dream with their country of cancer. This need to hold every tragedy between my lips. Pluck the drone like a berry and feel its awful sting down my throat. Vomit up the anonymous massacre. That's one practice. I wish I could understand it. It's this barbed dress. It's this fearfulness. It's you, outside, it's you. I am so jealous of your fluent energy.

Sun, star, blackhole. I am the gravity inwardly collapsing. I am a twin-language spoken in silence with myself. I am a sister with no sister. My sweet big brother. Keep me from falling upward with your mass. Keep me from smudging the ceiling glass.

II

Job's Wife

You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Job 2:10

today i'll windex
of the indoor glass

what's left uncracked

winnow the threshing floor grains
then dust up
what remains

we'll eat my leather corset
and tongue of sow

but you don't have anything to say
just now

while you stab boils with
shattered bowls
i sort

and clean
pink mildew
above the mirror

the color of a bride's bouquet

a token of accreted bliss
of kids

this fungal
remembrance

mold
is moisture off their skins
we together begat it

begat this
 this graven pith

spit

innocence into the fire

you don't ask me why

i don't weep

as you scratch

i clean mold

into babies i weaned

my eye sockets are barren

so is the sky

thankless

job

go curse god and die.

Phone Call

I hear you. You are thinking I
should find, as you find,

Daddy to be a Narcissist.
You sense resistance

in my breath and sputter
something angry, but subtler.

It's true I have nothing to say.

It's my blood that screams
long lines, then careens

into a red mass that might be my heart,
or might be a funeral for my heart.

I don't know who said those words.
Maybe something I heard.

Rest Stop

...only a fool's help is real help. The only uncertain thing is whether such help can still do a human being any good. It is more likely to help the angels who could do without help. — Walter Benjamin

I can't get past that truck
stop feeling
of being a woman.

It sucks
to have a conscience
and a body at the same time.

I harbor
here unknown
between breaking down
and home

and truckers like all strangers
are angels
more or less faces

to communicate
my distress
with the only ear
who will ever take them in:

dear God
who lives in the anonymity
of every human shape I pass
on the interstate

who lives
in my fear and whose love is big
enough to forgive my rape
dear God

send more surfaces
to bounce my feeling for you
deeper deeper
and undeflated.

Dear God prevent
me from being stranded
but keep all helpers
at bay.

Preserve them as angels
far away—

unfeatured faces
I'll never be forced
to thank or forgive
or feel against myself
and fear.

I am a woman's body.
Here.

Half-Moon Swan

Ugly Duck, still ugly,
searches for the conspirator of his short life:

picks by night a cream-tinted half-plate
on the pond. Swan.

A loon wails as Duck circles
and circles his mate

until she reaches the bank, goes matte.
Duck doesn't turn back

but pecks at a pale egg
he finds in the rushes so the yolk and fetus

leak into his eager beak.
Satisfied, he sleeps his ugly sleep.

Little Genocide

in me

was a grotesquerie of organs and tags
whose inventory

skins of man
made me shudder.

I could not let myself ever again
to head or hand
the shaft or
the stubble over a cleft chin.

What worked
was amalgamation.

I was stripped naked
and followed
the body and
we turned together
a corner

to a tiled room
we were made for

and made yes

we did together
on our back

while tiles marked off movement like a graph

Wide Words

Too young I heard
my friend being jerked
on his camp bed

up and down
by a Japanese boy
too beautiful to last.

Their words got into me
like a coda to all
that's unspeakable in sex:

Scary, scary, oh my God—
Anata wa okama
shine, shine !

What is their lesson now
as you thrust your serious dick
into my warm, decimated vagina

and go soft
as if a sleeping bag
or flag were what you felt

in there? God is near.
And an estuary
of untranslated curses

we can make believe
means the rising sun
from an empty tomb

has come to make us
brazen enough to die
mouthing agape *agape*.

Bleeding Gums

So it's come to this then, body?
For all the bother we've had
between us, even bound up breasts.
Cracking leg. Removed mole.
You still get the last ache, the last
toward dream incarnate? No ice
or apples. No words. Not even
the thump of cocaine. Just mouth
straight with shame. An organ
rusting at the pipe. And why?
What a way to brace me.
What a gallimaufry.

No. I'll keep my lines in yet.
Your mettle has a bearable taste,
I think, whereas an end to talking
would be like sugar for toothpaste.
I'd be everywhere. I'd have to replace
all my consonants with gall.
Our tongue would be such
a lonesome sucking stone.

Bataille Boy

Your flat white head and pale teary eyes
behind new glasses you still despise.
Monkeyish games with our dog in the park.
Mania. Music. How “good” you could cook.
Abhorrence of order. Blanchot versus Ponge.
Houseplants and Molly. Failures to launch.
Dinners with Ellsberg at Chez Panisse
barely broaching recent WikiLeaks.
Your bland-eyed brother, modeling shirts for the rich.
Home in Iowa. Never calling me “bitch.”
A way with children. Asleep in the bath.
Desire—your catchword. Your twisted Vas.
Love so sharp I don’t trust you understood
L’histoire de l’œil—“Bad Boy,” sterile and good.

Prodigal

Part of the return is beginning to give up
those nameless ones who in longing bought or shared
things like Belgian beer and Gorgonzola on nice bread
for you, or with you—before you understood
how to be near proximate people.

Their tender biddings, so rarely voiced,
rattled the homeless pieces of me I'd forgotten.
They hurt without touching any part.
Made me an icon of their heart.

I want to go home, I used to chant
like a mantra, hoping to be overheard.
But no one heard. Or rather, whatever
large ear perceived my prayer
had only a scant bit of his body
to offer up as a place

holder for how long
we might be waiting—

III

Wood

I had been alone for several months. I lived in an attic that smelled like an attic—dust, and cardboard, and something irreplaceable deposited by every former tenant.

At night, I thought about God, and asked myself if I was lonely. My bed was a mattress on the wood floor.

When I opened my eyes, I saw wood. The windows opened to the upper stories of trees. I was enclosed in wood. Safe was how I felt.

Then, someone came to live with me; I was not alone anymore. We bought a bed, and rested together, still surrounded by wood, but wood was farther from our backs. We felt safe.

We protected ourselves with more wooden things. We moved to a bigger place, took our wood with us. I was growing older and so was the wood, but only I was showing it.

There are many gentle ways of making things outlast, for a few years, our natural care for them. Wood is one. Its staid curves recall life. I would like to wake again enclosed in its arms.

Even now, rings are recording years, growing inside a tree already marked for death but not yet sawn through. I'll stay in that wood when it's cut and cured.

875 Donner Way

The father who believed

a pass through Utah

would help his children

to their California future faster

was an affable man.

His name was George.

The place he got his family

off course

to eat and be eaten

(he was himself eventually eaten,

even by the wife who outlasted

him a few weeks)

has been developed

for modern living

and bears his surname.

It's said the Donner way

was happy until

time came to branch off

and follow the letters

left nailed to trees Daddy

trusted. The words

were, finally,

only *Danger*.

The gray hills smudged

with ugly green and rust

where things went bad

for them: it is there

my own father lives

now, alone in a condo eight stories

above, packed with old movies

prone to skipping

and relics

of a future he's been cut off from.

He believed in the laserdisc.

The divorce was nasty.

But really, if I am sad

thinking of this place

it is because I know my father

like affable George

had high hopes
for the bypass he chose

and that I am still his
surviving daughter

whose silence long after
sordid events

is proof enough that I
got through a bad time
on flesh my forebear
trapped;

that the road
to my father's condo
is paved over
the good intentions
of one Donner patriarch

and I can't help
but pity all failures
whose wrong paths
lead them here. I am

that quiet
frontier girl. I could have
lived.

You Dreamed of Joni Mitchell and Ended up with Nico

Though I don't take heroin
I do not present myself prettily
and it's quite likely I have no talent
only limbs and skin and
an oddly accented language
of avoidance

in the bathroom mirror

I look like nobody you've ever seen before.

I wear the costume
of your dad

to all tomorrow's parties

making you my widow.
Poor tinder-stoker

you love me like the pyre
that will not go on smoking
without your fatty body
and your talk.

Before a Weeping Virgin

Whether or not we
credit the miracle

behind the tears
she is daughterly

in that she won't give up
crying Mother

with your stone face
don't you remember

the cotton smock
with the yellow piping

I wore to Easter
Tony picked out

my ribbon pretty
boy that he was Oh

Small wet eyes taste
of the special sweet

we eat once a year
first as we were

to find it hidden
in the Sunday garden

Garden Watcher

Here is the story of a glove I lost—a garden one I threw to my dog who got sick the next day. He likes rubber, but I'd been handling nightshade. He survived. And so on.

But before that, as I'd been tossing it for him to retrieve, a squatter in the old storehouse off the alley hung his naked body half out the window. One hand pressed a cigarette to his lips, and with the other he shielded his chest like a woman.

Or, it was his heart he cradled, as though it were a baby he would soon be in danger giving up. Anyway, he should have been more careful.

We were performing for him: our toss and return gag. My dog who'd go through bouts of hellish diarrhea the next day, still prancing like a show pony and lapping up poison.

I don't know what of us he could see—the squatter—I suppose he was welcome to it. Like a trashy god fielding our first fruits. Is there a difference between losing and giving away?

In fact, a stranger watched us from a window and because there was no law by which he was my neighbor, I showed him who I wished we were. I do not usually throw gloves for my dog.

A secret hand hides in daylight. All's not right.

Chris, Me & Oscar-Dog

It doesn't mean that I
wash him twice a month or
feed him from my hands—
that I love him. I kiss
his thick snout and he thunks
his tail under the dresser.

When Chris and I broke up,
I was so angry because of Oscar.
It boiled my blood,
as they say.

They, us then,
would do anything for him, but
Chris did most.
He knew to kiss him
and rub underneath his collar
when I still thought I wanted
to be a priest. Chris,
Chris sniffed his oily fur
and walked him
across the dell.

Now, I do.
It was our terms,
good terms, the good news
of parting,
that we'd help him.
Doggy body. Doggy soul.

Chris moved to Brooklyn,
my boy, and I
have this sweet black
lab, my experiment
in love.

Pony

Somewhere there is a thing
called Pony that is not
cantering or trotting or plodding along.
That is not gone
lame or averting
its tender eyes.
But a pony
that is
recurring.

When I was fifteen
I hiked in Dartmoor
behind a boy I loved.
We made a trash fire and roasted hot dogs.
On the way back
I spotted a pony in the wood
the way elsewhere
you might sight a deer.

Hello pony
said my boy
and we kept walking.

Years later
in my work in a hospital
I came upon Kenneth
who was a master engraver
of his love's every shape.

He had one pony left
in his collection.
It was already framed
and cost nearly nothing—
maybe because he was going to die so soon—
I bought this pony then
recalled what I'd met in the wood.

How strange to realize
no one shares your vision
of a pony.

How strange
that Pony
is not yours alone
but a way of returning
the lost beloved—
the last pony
that is
hanging.

Contact Partner
To Altin

Today I had a missive. Or, email, more properly.

From you. My friend. Miles away.

You send love, and love, and love.

Report that you have been dancing.

It's something called "Contact Improvisation."

To be done with a partner.

And don't I remember how we sprawled the day I confessed I didn't understand "joy"?

Your going, the made beds: yet suspended over our heads.

The lifts we did because we couldn't fly.

I prefer invisibility, I replied.

My dear friend. Do I see now?

You had just laid off teasing me about my project on the Lindberg baby.

And even though we are not all together happy, we agree. Today is glad.

And there is a long way down.

Prayer

Darkness retreats from Job's feet
And day pours libations of light

Signifying repair, not only of *skin*,
But of *oxen* and *fields* and a *womb*,

And reparations to be paid by men
Whose own days have *not come yet*;

And a *lightening* in his day-broken heart:
The feeling of names, daughters' names,

Cinnamon, Dove, Horn of Eyesshade,
Unfolding, like coming months. Yes,

This once and soon again father plants
His feet, stands to regard *the sun*

Winding up the whirling sky, and,
In an instant, an instant that *houses* eternity,

Blinks his grace: Dear One,
Thanks.

The Man Who Died

Imagine strong hands roughed
by the hammer and the plane.

Long fingers, and palms cupped
as though expecting. Because he understood

the body, he also understood
how a man, and he was,

could lose himself
in another one. For this reason,

he forewent sex with any body
in particular. He died

more virgin than his mother
with her three boys and Joseph.

Still, though, we remember
the son's flesh

in bread. We remember his blood
as a balanced red

aphrodisiac I drink solo
after a long day in company.

Why, then, is it forbidden
to remember a whole anatomy

that must, more than once,
have experienced frissons

not quite equivalent with lust?
A narrow torso (its cleaned slash),

flexing tendons of wrist,
and curled paths

of real hair looping a navel
to drift beneath a linen cloth where

a cock—ready whenever
you are ready

to finish your communion
with no body in particular—

has not yet escaped.
In the crucial moment

He lifts his chin
and looks me in the eye

so we are face to face.

Pond

Even when everything else is gone
from here, there will still be a pond:
thick, vernal, much

the color of a newly opened swimming pool
after a long New England winter
under cover, and stinking warmly of oil.

The pond has no border, no raised hand,
no flame. Everything is only another
member of the water's green

democracy: roads someone crossed
a silver platter, the skull of a baptist,
children, drowned rats, roots

unsoiled and unnamed. Above all
the light of the local star goes on reflecting
upon this clouded ball—interrupted

at intervals by a resonant belch
from the deep that may be the last laugh
of a holy ghost, excusing

the roiling waters steeped in all history
for making Her again.

From me to You

The stakes are too high with life these days. You have a certain number of years, and a certain number of opportunities, like little handouts, that you're either smart enough to take, or not smart enough.

I think I am not smart enough. I have been developing a human person. She, I'll also call her "me," is odd. But intelligent. Also, angular, tall. Quite rare. And thanks to a particular combination of manufacturing snafus, likely to be an acquired taste. Worthy, though, of a voice—a siphon for the vowel undercurrent of my life.

Here she is at a truck stop, on the proverbial skids, asking questions, a little higher pitched: how long before I turn a trick? Maybe the waitress will teach me how to suck a dick? And, what needs be lost for such to be my choice? Is also, this, my voice, the only portal between my cell and the world that condemns and levels?

See, she is terrified of being sold. Terrified, really, of being told: You didn't understand. You have persisted too long in your solipsism. We're so sorry. We thought everyone knew: it's not you we want, it's more of us. Here is a penis. Please insert it, like so. A cock is a handout. An opportunity. You're welcome.

I thank you. She hears you. She knows she must be excellent. If a door, not unlike the Baptistery in Florence; if a road, not unlike that to Emmaus.

But I'm getting off course—that's her failing: unwieldiness. She's not easy to reign-in. She likes to go one way, then another. She loves the special rooms she has access to: the chambers hiding another Mom all covered in snake tattoos and getting by in the unkempt parts of Connecticut.

So, that's some of what she can do. I cannot figure how to make her like anyone else. But here she is: private, dense, yet strangely ordered Taylor, up from the depths of all her sins and bad thoughts. And the ones done in love, too: the running list she kept of all the dedications she'd give. Obsessive gratitude to strangers.

Yes, it's true. I finally began writing down their names in a particularly careful notebook, so that someday when the file makers are taking their last tour of my material, find: to Mr. Breen, to Brian Yates, to Brian Flynn—the grocery store bag boy who my mother loved, who saw a happy life in us each week at the store. Then pick it apart, deconstruct my handmade bones.

In other words: the stakes are so high. This is an exchange. I am selling a bit of my labor. I have no representation. This is my voice. And by the way: I love you, too. Some of your names are already on my list. To be continued.

Meeting Points

One morning I was
Up and realized I'd been
Counting, by one, the whole
Time. I'd been attacking one,
Scraping one, spreading my
Legs for one. One had been
Dripping out of me.

Awake, fed, sun-warmed:
I was inside, reading,
When "points" came to me:
What a hand does
Multiple times,
Or two hands do together
(together like a steeple,
together like a gun).

Points, which sounds like "prince"
Or "pony" or "ponds." The scummy
Vernal pool, occasional pond
The dogs ate frog from
At Aunt Mary's house
Near Salem. With
Perhaps One, perhaps
Every
Watcher,

I stopped counting
In the red and
White town, and
Began pointing
With the wide
Flair of my hand

Notes

“Singing in the Road”:

The poem includes a line from “Why Don’t We Do It in the Road” by John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

“Job’s Wife”:

The epigraph uses The New Revised Standard Version biblical translation.

“Rest Stop”:

The epigraph is taken from an essay by Walter Benjamin.

Benjamin, Walter. “Some Reflections on Kafka.” *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 143.

“You Dreamed of Joni Mitchell and Ended up with Nico”:

The poem includes a line from “All Tomorrow’s Parties” by Lou Reed.

“Twin Language”:

The poem includes a line from “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks.

Biographical Statement

Taylor Daynes was born in La Jolla, California in 1986, and grew up on the North Shore of Massachusetts. She received her BA in English from Vanderbilt University in 2008, and her MA in Religion from Yale Divinity School in 2013. She currently resides in Baltimore, Maryland with her black lab, Oscar.